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Pontifical Biblical Commission, The Inspiration and Truth of Sacred Scripture. The Word that Comes from God and Speaks of God for the Salvation of the World. Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2014.

James Chukwuma Okoye C.S.Sp.

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PONTIFICAL BIBLICAL COMMISSION,

*THE INSPIRATION AND TRUTH OF SACRED SCRIPTURE. THE WORD THAT COMES FROM GOD AND SPEAKS OF GOD FOR THE SALVATION OF THE WORLD.* COLLEGEVILLE: LITURGICAL PRESS, 2014

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At the 2008 Synod of Bishops on the Word of God, there was much debate on the inspiration and truth of sacred Scripture. The question was how to understand *Dei Verbum* 11 and 12 in view of apparent contradictions and even unethical behaviors in certain passages of the Bible. Belief in the inspiration and truth of Scripture is foundational, but has never been formally defined. Of the Propositions the bishops handed the pope at the end of the Synod, Proposition 12 asked to clarify the matter. The pope turned the question over to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, which tasked the Pontifical Biblical Commission (a body of 20 biblical scholars appointed by the pope from across the church, the president of which is the Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith) to begin study in 2009. The result is the above document. The Foreword by Cardinal Müller states that this is neither a declaration from the magisterium nor meant to be a complete doctrine regarding the inspiration and truth of Scripture. The authors affirm not to intend to formulate a doctrine of inspiration in competition with what is usual in the manuals of theology, but to search out how Scripture itself points to the divine provenance of its assertions (no. 137), also to suggest possible ways to interpret difficult passages within the framework of the faith (no. 150). The document has three Parts.

Part I, *The Testimony of the biblical Writings on their Origin from God*. Inspiration concerns the divine activity both on the authors and on the writings themselves. It differs from revelation, which is the act by which God communicates who he is and the mystery of his will (no. 7). The human authors constantly affirm personal faith in God and obedience to the various forms of divine revelation. The authors illustrate this with select Old Testament and New Testament texts, the prophetic word and its “thus says the Lord” being the clearest model. Jesus is “the culmination of the revelation of God the Father” (Ben XVI, *Verbum Domini*, 20). The writings of the New Testament attest to the inspiration of the Old Testament and interpret it Christologically (no. 54).

Part II, *The Testimony of the biblical Writings to their Truth*. *Dei Verbum* 11 avoided the term, inerrancy, which might suggest lack of error of any kind in the Bible (no. 63). The truth affirmed is that which God wanted put into the sacred writings *for the sake of our salvation*, hence restricting it to “divine revelation which concerns God himself and the salvation of the human race” (no. 105). Christ is the truth (John 14:6), the fullness of truth being manifested in his person and kingdom. Reading for truth, the creation story (Genesis 1), for example, does not tell us *how* the world came into being, but *why* and *for what purpose* it is as it is (no. 67). Not all texts of the Bible explicitly focus on God and his will for salvation. For example, the Song of Songs celebrates human marital love. But in the faith tradition, it received *additional* meanings in terms of the passionate love of God for his people and for humanity (no. 77). The Book of Revelation portrays the fierce struggle between the “structure of Christ” and the “earthly structure” that ushers in the kingdom of God within the human realm (no. 96). The authors call for a canonical approach to Scripture: “the canon of Scripture is the adequate interpretive context for each of the traditions of which it is composed” (no. 103).

Part III, *The Interpretation of the Word of God and its Challenges*. There are historical problems and ethical and social problems. Divergences in the Infancy Narratives and the Resurrection stories, for example, serve to highlight the agreements in each case – the relationship of Jesus with God, his virginal conception, and his role as Savior of humankind. “The purely historical elements have a subordinate function” (no. 123). The church removed certain passages from public reading in the Liturgy, yet that does not gainsay their charism of inspiration (no. 125). The law of retaliation (“an eye for an eye”) is a reasonable means of furthering the common good – equal proportion between crime and punishment – which many legal systems have adopted. The ban exterminating whole populations during the Conquest requires a nonliteral interpretation as in the command to cut off one’s hand or pluck out one’s eye in Matt 5:29. In fact, since the Canaanites are seen by God as guilty of very serious crimes and the victories are consistently attributed to the Lord, the law is “a duty of justice similar to the prosecution, condemnation, and execution of a criminal guilty of a capital crime” (no. 127). Prayers calling for vengeance are merely metaphors. “Smash their children against the rock means to annihilate, without the possibility of their reproducing in the future, the malignant forces which destroy life” (no. 129). Ultimately, it is the same as “deliver us from Evil.” The injunctions against women in parts of the Pauline literature do not agree with Gal 3:28 (no longer male nor female). Teaching and governance were at that time reserved for men. Paul “invites the interiorization of relationships or social roles considered stable and enduring at a certain period,” though “we can still regret that Paul in these letters did not clearly assert equality of social status for believing spouses” (no. 132). Every single biblical passage does not necessarily contain the full revelation of God or the perfect revelation of morality. “Single passages of Scripture, therefore, must not be isolated or absolutized but must be understood and evaluated in their relationship with the fullness of revelation in the person and work of Jesus and in the framework of a canonical reading of Sacred Scripture” (no. 136). Christ is the center which sheds light on the whole of Scripture (no. 147). The aim in this last part especially has been to show both how to overcome fundamentalism and avoid skepticism (no. 4). For, “we cannot...ignore demands of our time and interpret the texts of the Bible outside their historical context; we must read them in our time, with and for our contemporaries” (no. 136).

*James Chukwuma Okoye, C.S.Sp.*